



Crawley
college



Engaging with Crawley Students

This reports on our partnership engagement with students of Crawley College.

July 2019





Why we are engaging with local people?

This engagement is part of our mental health priority work and the outcome we are seeking is that



The lived experiences of Young People (aged 11-25) and their families, directly informs



and influence the outcomes from the Independent Review of Children and Young Peoples' emotional and wellbeing services and their experiences in Sussex.

We are working collaboratively to gain opportunities for hearing from local young people and their families, to make sure more peoples' experiences inform the Sussex-wide independent review of Children and Young Peoples mental health and wellbeing services, which is currently happening.

Last year, we co-produced resources with young adults so we could engage under 25s in conversations around their mental health and wellbeing.

After discussions with Crawley College we took part in several engagement events at the College during May 2019:

- Participated in the *Be Healthy, Stay Safe* event
- Delivered presentations to two classes of students using the ice-breaking activities from our Resource Pack (available to educational facilities and youth organisations to use independently or supported, from July 2019). Afterward the groups broke into discussion teams.

Focus Group 1 - Access to Higher Education students hoping to enter healthcare courses at degree level.

Focus Group 2 - Level 2 Health and Social Care students (aged 16-17)

- Facilitated healthcare discussions with groups and individuals at the Crawley Campus.
- We also have an online survey young people can complete [here](#).

Thank you

Our thanks to the students and staff of Crawley College, for their support and help in gaining this insight.



Recommendations

There are requirements for health and care system to respond to our reports³ and recommendations made with them.

A draft of this report was shared with the Panel, for the Sussex Independent Review of Children and Young Peoples Emotion and Mental Wellbeing, so they could consider the finding and the recommendations. Whilst we would normally ask for a formal response to the recommendations returned within 20 days of receiving the report, we appreciate this is a far reach review with its own engagement programme.

Instead, we will expect to see evidence that this insight has informed the Panel's consideration and is reflected in its own recommendations, which should be available next year.

We make the following recommendations to support the health and care system to improve services and young peoples' experience and wellbeing.

- The Review should seek to ensure the following to avoid positive progress in mental wellbeing slipping backwards whilst re-joining a waiting list to get the needed extra time:
 - there is good/accessible information to support those who refer young people to commissioned services, so they understand access criteria for such services, and that
 - commissioned services are designed to enable flexibility in the duration of support to meet the individual needs of young people,
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, who deliver the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in West Sussex, should review internal decision-making and communication processes and implement changes to make sure young people (and where appropriate their families) are timely updated on service offer and, if refused a service, be clear where support can be accessed.

³ [Section 44 of The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities \(Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch\) Regulations 2012](#)



What students told us?

We had many conversations with students and staff around mental health. Often people were knowledgeable on some of the support available for young people in the area. However, their experiences varied, and several themes emerged.

Borders (commissioning)

The College has students from many areas including Brighton, East Sussex and other areas of West Sussex, as well as London.

Talking to both students and staff, a common concern was around the difficulty in accessing support due to funding boundaries. The difficulty with access is problematic even within West Sussex or Sussex. Staff described challenges in finding support as a *maze that both the students and the pastoral team struggle with.*

Access pathways can be tricky; with varying waiting times and referral criteria and result in confusion and rejected referrals. These experiences echo sentiments heard at both Chichester University and Chichester College.

Educational providers are a main signposting and referral point for young people and it is critical they are well supported to do this.

Access

The staff told us they find services are simply not timely enough *It's important to act quickly when someone comes for help and the length of time referrals can take, the paperwork etc, as well as waiting times are not helpful. It can mean you miss the window of opportunity to support that young person, and the systems to access services are getting in the way.* Conversations in Chichester indicate this is a common barrier to support.

In addition, we heard that it is often difficult for a young person to make that first call needed for self-referral to a service. It can also be hard for them to ask for support in making the call. This suggests it is important that services and commissioners are aware of this hurdle and ensure that there are different ways of making first contact.



And we heard people express concern that Children's and Adolescent Mental Health Services (known as CAMHS) are only available when extreme crisis has been reached.

A focus group at Crawley College discussed how hard mental health support, for adults and children, was to access and that there was almost a culture that accepted escalation had to occur before help was accessible. One student told us of a friend's experience when her child became anxious and aggressive. The family tried to access CAMHS but did not meet the criteria. The mother was left with the belief that help was not there unless the child's behaviour further escalated, and they tried to kill themselves.

This family, we were told, were left with no idea where else to get help and felt that there was no support available from the establishment, other than medication.

This suggests a lack of preventative support and communication exists and a situation has been created where people may feel they need to take desperate measures to be heard.

Under 11s

Although these College students are 16 plus, during the conversations concerns were raised about access to mental health support for children under 11. Once again, these concerns are common across West Sussex, with parents and carers telling us they struggle to find support for their children.

From talking to a wider range of people working within West Sussex support services, we heard there is a worry amongst staff regarding their lack of knowledge about where to refer young children, and that often, they do not understand why some families get support and others do not.



From our experience of listening to local people (both those in need of support and those providing support) we suggest that families do not have equitable access, and not because of differences in need. We believe much of this is due to a lack of referrer knowledge (including GPs) and the availability of services in different areas.

School support

The focus group were concerned that schools are having to pick up mental health support due to difficulties accessing help within the healthcare system. It was perceived that most school staff are not trained in mental health and there is a lack of services, e.g. counselling. We are also aware that priority is given to pupils who are facing GCSEs, where such support is available, rather access based on need. Similarly, parents tell us of a disparity between schools.



The group felt that training and services needed to be increased as schools *are out of their depth*, only *scratching the surface rather than tackling underlying issues* due to lack of time, knowledge and skills.

We have also heard this from College staff, who feel they are supporting students with complex mental health needs that are beyond their skill set.

This is a concern heard from different groups around the County and there needs to be an awareness that schools in West Sussex are already overstretched and underfunded. In addition, schools have their own priorities that can conflict with emotional wellbeing and act as triggers, e.g. SATs, exams, behavioural policies, workload, expectations.

Changing from children's services to adult ones (Transition)

Students told us that changing from CAMHS to adult services was frequently less than ideal. A common story is of being referred to adult services but not meeting their access criteria.

One teenage girl told us, *I wasn't considered severe enough. My mum helps me hold it all together but I'm struggling.* Another student said, *CAMHS was great in helping to get a diagnosis (Autism) but then I turned 18 so was transferred out. I've had no help since!*

We have heard similar stories from other parts of the county. We spoke to a young man with a diagnosis of Autism. He told us the transition to adult services was supported well whilst he was at school but since leaving, what he can access has changed and he's struggling. He is frustrated and anxious without the previous structure around him.

It is worrying that transitioning to adult services is driving by age rather than need. Too often, we hear of young people who have been coping well with their support systems, only to lose them at what is already a vulnerable time, coinciding with them leaving college and needing to think about work or higher education. A lack of clear guidance for claiming vital financial support as they move forward into adulthood is leaving some families in distressing financial situations.

We recognise West Sussex County Council's Life-Long Services transformational Programme is seeking to address these issues.

If you or a young adult with a lifelong condition or conditions, and are struggling to adjust to adult life and need support but have been unable to get it, you can contact lifelongservices@westsussex.gov.uk or call them on 01243 642 121.

Continuity of care

Alongside transition, continuity of care was a reoccurring theme at the College. This often seemed to be hampered by processes, rather than being person-centred, and undermined positive experiences of services, e.g. some students found the Youth Emotional Service (known as YES) helpful but were only able to access a limited number of sessions before discharge, despite the ongoing need. *I was told I had to go back on the waiting list for further support and my mental health has suffered because of this break in support.* One student felt that not being able to access YES was putting a strain on their family and friends and they were worried that they'd *wear them out* or *lose them*.



This also applied to young people under a more long-term service. One student told us how difficult it was to communicate with CAMHS, and said they just *leave you hanging* and do not respond to phone calls, etc. This student said they would rather be discharged than think there was support when there was none. It was mentioned that communication and follow-up after appointments were often poor and this was frustrating.

Family support

The students often cited family, friends and, more specifically, their mums as being the mainstays of their emotional and mental wellbeing. They often felt that this was enough, however, we have spoken to many parents and hear of their struggles in supporting their children whilst trying to maintain relationships, work, sleep, their own health, etc. Parents have said they are at a loss trying to get their child support. They are also often supporting more than one child.

This raises questions that cannot be ignored when looking at children and young peoples' emotional wellbeing; Who supports the carers? What happens if they are ill or unable to sustain that level of involvement? And how do we mitigate the effects on the wider family?

Knowledge and working together

A common thread running through many of these experiences is a lack of knowledge by providers and support networks of what is available and their access requirements.

The essential services of signposting and service navigation are often weak and different organisations often do not work or communicate with each other effectively. This is counterproductive at best



positive stories come from working together, as we heard from one student who was supported by both CAMHS and Crawley College Pastoral team.

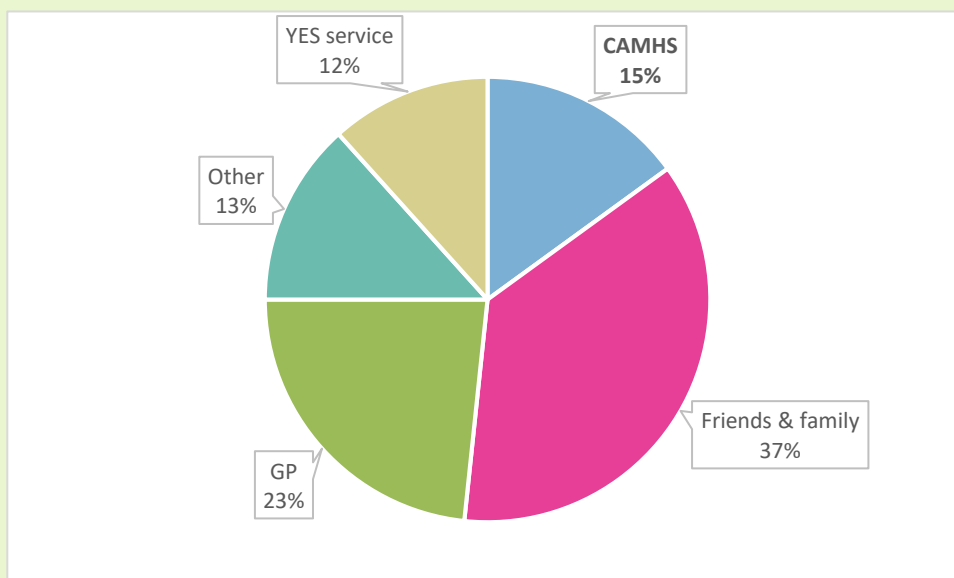
Need for mental health support

Using a simple *Beads in a jar* activity as an ice-breaker, we asked students at the *Be Healthy, Stay Safe* event if they had ever felt the need to get support for their mental health?

- Over 90% said yes, they had felt they needed to get support for their mental health

We then asked where they found this support (from the 60 sources students had used)?

- when asked, “other” included College based support, on-line forums and 1 girl cited an app.



As part of our conversations, we encouraged the young people to think about what they did to make themselves happy, what they found relaxing and what helped them cope with stress. They could then enter this information into a website that produced a word cloud infographic.

Several people cited their phones as being something that kept them calm and helped them stay happy. 1 or 2 students said they used specific meditation apps¹.

[illegible]

Crawley College Students in May 2019

What are the Tips and Tricks for staying healthy and happy?

From the College stand:

- Do the best for you / never give up / Don't listen to negative people. You're great.
- Take time for you and relaxing / Be kind to yourself - stop beating yourself up over everything
- Be in the moment / Live in the moment / Take every day as if it's your last
- Do not hate / be positive / Smile, even if you don't always feel like it / Surround yourself with positive people / Laughing
- Evaluate your values in life
- Dance to your favourite music / Dance like nobody's watching.
- Doing sports with friends / Exercise/the gym
- Have an escape e.g. music, reading
- Reading
- Take time away from your phone and relax
- Enjoy every opportunity
- Positive thinking
- Eat more veg, drink plenty of water
- Get outside - trees and sunshine for mental health
- Be yourself. Don't let anyone judge you. Be who you are.
- Socialising with friends at clubs with my own age group



What makes these young people more stressed?

Using a *sharps* box, students were encouraged to write down the things that make them stressed and to use the sharps box to throw them away.

Several students said that they didn't really get stressed and were '*chilled*'. A common denominator in this group was that they either had found their flow state (cooking, cleaning and exercise were examples) or cited supportive family and friendship groups.

There were several students who stated that everything was overwhelming, and once again, we needed to chat and sensitively question to pinpoint the actual stress triggers.





These are the stressors young people spoke about

Family/friends	Learning	Internal mental thoughts	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drama around me• My dad /brother / family• When people put pressure on me• An overload of people trying to talk to me at the same time• Boyfriend• Social interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• College and course work• Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily things - knowing what my plan is helps• Over-analysing / thinking• Fear of losing people because of my mental health• Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Life / people / everything• When there are too many things going on at the same time• Negativity and discrimination• People being intolerant of disabilities• Public speaking• Social services

We also heard comments like:

- Nothing! I absorb myself in things I love.
- Nothing really - chilled



Focused Discussions

Focus Group 1 - Access to Higher Education students hoping to enter healthcare courses at degree level.

This group discussion focussed around mental health support for young people. They thought schools and colleges were central to this.

What feels positive?

- That there's more funding being allocated to mental health.
- Education facilities are providing training to staff.
- Happy that Universities and mental health are being linked.

What concerns them currently?

- Lack of training and availability for mental health support need, particularly for children.
- Situation must escalate before students can access help.

What they said they would like to see?

- Better training specific for mental health and different age groups.
- More support for University students. Current waiting lists are too long, and they were aware of suicides happening.
- Proper help for young people who have the tendency to bully, not just the victims but the bullies themselves.
- And on a different note, bereavement teams for midwifery units.

Discussion on the NHS Long Term Plan

- There was a need for increased services in schools.
- Feel that at the moment schools are out of their depth.

Several of the group had children who were receiving some kind of bullying at Primary school. One parent's child was being 'picked on' and being physically hurt. Although the situation was tackled by staff the bully simply moved on to another child. They felt that the underlying issue, the 'why', wasn't being addressed, either due to no time or lack of knowledge over how to address it. They felt that it was brushed under the carpet rather than being tackled and that there was nowhere outside of the school to get help. The story resonated with several in the group who shared similar stories.



Class 2 - were Level 2 Health and Social Care students (aged 16-17)

What feels positive?

- You can get support.
- The doctors are good at giving advice - posters, leaflets and information, if available.
- Free care for the majority of people.
- Nice people.
- GP understands you and your issues.
- They try their best to help you.

What concerns them currently?

- Waiting times are too long.
- Hard to get through on the phone (to GPs).
- They (doctors) don't always take serious things seriously.
- Not enough staff.
- Toilets can be smelly and dirty.
- Phone calls - they never pick-up and need better hold music.
- More seats needed in waiting rooms.
- More doctors working.
- Bigger signs.
- Cheaper food in hospitals.
- More people in reception.

What they said they would like to see?

- Shorter waiting times.
- More GP services so easier to get appointments and to reduce waiting times.
- For appointment times to be kept.



- Understanding that everyone is not the same and that some people suffer with mental health illnesses and disabilities.
- More services.
- Better wheelchairs at hospitals etc.
- More activities for children in waiting rooms.
- Online and face to face support for mental health.



Next steps

Continuing our engagement

There is a push to think differently about how mental health and wellbeing is approached with children and young people.

Healthwatch West Sussex wants to engage with young people to find out what they think about healthcare services and what they need, as well as empower them to know their voices can make a difference. Bearing this in mind, we would like to run a focus group to discover what matters most to the students.

Caroline from our team will work with Beth, Student Experience Co-ordinator at the College, and Maddie a student representative, to design and deliver the group and to think about further development.

Sharing our learning

This report, along with others, will be shared with the Independent Review Panel and we expect to see the outcomes from this review to show how the experiences and voices of young people have influenced and shaped their recommendations for future service delivery.

Following up on our recommendations and engagement



We will confirm outcomes by:

Checking back with our young people and family networks that we have understood what is strong and what is wrong for children and young people services in West Sussex, before sharing case studies and reports with the Independent Review Panel.

- Asking the Independent Review Panel to demonstrate how local experiences have informed and influenced the Panel's recommendations.



We will understand if we have made a difference by:

Working with community support organisations and education providers to understand what young people and families say about the ease of preventative support; and accessibility to, and appropriateness of, crisis support when needed.



About our Partner



Crawley College, College Road, Crawley,
West Sussex, RH10 1NR.

Principal: Vicki Illingworth

Crawley College is part of the Chichester College Group, the largest provider of further education in Sussex. Based in Crawley town centre, the College offers a wide range of vocational courses and Apprenticeships, plus adult education and progression onto undergraduate courses, through partnerships with universities. As an established provider of professional training the College also works closely with businesses to develop their work forces through a wide variety of flexible training and development programmes.

The College told us that they take a '*You said, we did*' approach, as well as an open access ethos around students being able to take ideas and initiatives to staff members.

Students are constantly updated to ensure they are kept in the loop and know they are being listened to. The student voice is very important.

Methods of communication with the students include: Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

They have the social media tools in place to communicate interactive messages to students and staff, including Moodle - open source learning environment.

The college run focus groups and the students are very engaged. Student representatives are involved in making decisions across the college - on college board, involved in interview panels, decision making, Q&As, deciding on posters etc. The environment is set up for student engagement.

It has been a very positive and empowering experience working with Healthwatch in this way. We've been living with the challenges expressed in this report for a long time and believe this collaboration is vital for giving us and our students a voice now and going forward.

Vicki Illingworth, Principal, Crawley College



About Us

Healthwatch is here to make care better.

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need.

We also help people find the information they need about services in West Sussex.



We here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey - wherever it is taking you.

We have the power to make sure that the government and those in charge of services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them.

You can review how we performed and how we report on what we have done by visiting our website www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

Contact us

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Healthwatch West Sussex works with Help & Care to provide its statutory activities.



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